

# URBAN AGRICULTURE

*PROMOTING AGRICULTURE IN  
OUR URBAN COMMUNITY*

*ARLINGTON COUNTY  
URBAN AGRICULTURE  
CITIZEN TASK FORCE*

John Vihstadt, Chair  
Joan Horwitt, Vice Chair



Lili Lara, a resident of Virginia Gardens in Arlington, harvests onions from the property's community garden. *Catholic Herald*, 11/6/12.

# QUIZ TIME

1.



2.



3.



# WHAT WAS OUR GERMINATION?

The County Board in March 2012 implemented the Arlington Urban Agriculture Initiative and appointed a citizen volunteer task force.

Why?

- To research best practices in sustainable urban agriculture policies and programs and make recommendations to support, expand and integrate Arlington's existing urban agriculture efforts consistent with our community values and adopted Vision Statement:

*"Arlington will be a diverse and inclusive world-class urban community with secure, attractive residential and commercial neighborhoods where people unite to form a caring, learning, participating, sustainable community in which each person is important."*



-Task Force "Charge," 5-22-12

# WHAT WERE THE UATF GOALS?

- **Promote Community Wellness** - by expanding the availability of low cost, nutritious food and nutrition awareness, thereby reducing hunger and obesity in the community;
- **Promote Environmental Sustainability** - by increasing locally grown food, reducing transportation costs, promoting composting, and exploring other food-related environmental sustainability strategies; and
- **Enhance Education and Learning** - by exposing people to the origins of food and better connecting them to the land.

-Task Force Charge

# WHAT WERE OUR TASKS?

- **Develop an inventory** of existing programs/activities and identify critical gaps
- **Research best practices** and investigate issues concerning food security, health and fitness benefits, food and zoning ordinance changes and food transfer infrastructure
- **Identify the pros and cons** of bringing to Arlington urban agriculture programs not currently available (e.g. rooftop gardens, container/window gardening, food carts with local food, land exchanges, demonstration gardens/farm, backyard hens, backyard sharing)
- **Propose a Food Action Plan** that integrates existing and proposed urban agriculture policies and programs
- **Identify possible public and private sector partners**

# WHO WERE OUR TASK FORCE MEMBERS?

- Darnell Carpenter, *Civic Federation*
- Rosemary Ciotti, *Planning Commission*
- Lincoln Cummings, *Commission on Aging*
- Catie Drew, *At Large*
- David Garcia, *Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment*
- Darryl Hobbs, *At Large*
- Joan Horwitt, *Reevesland Learning Center/Task Force Vice Chair*
- Dennis Jaffee, *Executive Director, BRAVO*
- Puwen Lee, *Arlington Food Assistance Center*

# WHO WERE OUR TASK FORCE MEMBERS?

## (continued)

- Amy Maclosky, *Director, Food and Nutrition Services, APS*
- Conor Marshall, *Park and Recreation Commission*
- Sara Meservey, *Environment and Energy Conservation Commission*
- Audrey Morris, *At Large*
- Gay Mount, *Arlington Interfaith Counsel*
- Mike Nardolilli, *Northern Virginia Regional Parks Authority*
- Joel Thevoz, *Main Event Caterers*
- Mary Van Dyke, *Virginia Cooperative Extension Leadership Council*
- John Vihstadt, *Task Force Chair*



# HOW DID WE HARVEST NEW IDEAS?

1. The UATF website:  
[www. Arlingtonva.us/portals/topics/urbanAg.aspx](http://www.Arlingtonva.us/portals/topics/urbanAg.aspx)
2. Our online forum:
  - visit [www.arlingtonva.us](http://www.arlingtonva.us)
  - search “Urban Ag”
  - click the link to “Task Force Priorities”
3. Comments to UATF staff liaison Kimberly Haun at  
[khaun@arlingtonva.us](mailto:khaun@arlingtonva.us).

Kirit Mookerjee and Virginia Geoffrey pose next to a community garden pumpkin.

PHOTO COURTESY:  
BRAVO





4. “Open Arlington” and PLACE Initiative led by Mary Hynes: Nearly 500 people have read our online topic, with many ranking various possible priorities ranging from rooftop gardens to backyard livestock to land exchanges to food carts

5. Regular open, publicized meetings



KATIE COLLINS | CATHOLIC HERALD  
Richard Blair Robinson, a resident at Whitefield Commons

6. Open Forum on Backyard Hens, Central Library, (July, 2012), recipient of the coveted Sun-Gazette “Thumbs Up” award for giving “both proponents and opponents of Arlington hen-raising the chance to state their case”

7. Kiosk at Arlington County Fair: August 2012

8. Presence at all 7 County Farmer Markets:

- Court House (Saturdays, 8 am – noon)
- Ballston (Thursdays, 3-7 pm)
- Clarendon (Wednesdays, 2-7 pm)
- Columbia Pike (Sundays, 9 am – 1 pm)
- Crystal City (Tuesdays, 3-7 pm)
- Rosslyn (Thursdays, 11 am – 3 pm)
- Westover (Sundays, 9 am – noon)

9. “Community Conversations in Urban Agriculture”

10. Committee of 100

11. Chairman Tejada’s Latino Community Roundtable

12. Civic Federation & Neighborhood Associations

13. Groups such as Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment (ACE)

In drafting the report and crafting recommendations, we tried to **PACE** ourselves by focusing on what is...

- **P**ractical
- **A**ttainable and
- **C**ost-**E**ffective

# WHAT WERE SOME OF THE BIG ISSUES?

# Guerilla Gardeners?

What we want  
to avoid:

## 'War on gardens' sweeps U.S. cities

*Homeowners run  
afoul of officials*

By Steven Kurutz  
©2012, The New York Times

Jason Helvenston was at work on his second crop, spreading compost to fertilize the carrots, bok choy, kale and dozens of other vegetables he grows organically on his property in Orlando, Fla., when the trouble began.

Helvenston spent last Super Bowl Sunday planting the garden outside his 1940s cottage, in a neighborhood of modest houses close to downtown. Orlando's growing season is nearly year-round, and Helvenston, a self-employed sustainability consultant for the building trade, said he saw the garden as "a budget thing" — a money-saving supplement to the chicken coop he and his wife, Jennifer, installed a few months later behind their house.

Since his backyard doesn't get much sun, Jason Helvenston ripped out the lawn in his front yard and put the 25-by-25-foot, micro-irrigated plot there. The unorthodox landscaping went largely unnoticed for months, perhaps because he lives on a dead-end street next to Interstate 4. Then, in September, Pedro Pedin, who lives in Puerto Rico but owns the rental property next door, visited with his wife and cast a displeased eye on his neighbor's front yard.

"All the houses are pretty much kept neat," Pedin said, "but his house looks like a farm."

Pedin contacted the city, which cited the Helvenstons for violating section 60.207 of Orlando's Land Development Code (failure to maintain ground cover on property) and set a deadline of Nov. 7 to comply.

Instead, Helvenston stood outside his polling site during the last election circulating a petition to change the code and then appeared on a local TV news station, telling the reporter and any city officials who happened to be watching, "You'll take my house before you take my vegetable garden."

Gardeners aren't generally known for their civil disobedience, yet in the past couple of years several have run afoul of local officials for tending vegetables in their front yards. In Ferguson, Mo., a stay-at-home father was ordered to dig up his 55 varieties of edible plants. In Tulsa, Okla., a gardener who didn't want to remove her veggies and medicinal herbs saw them largely cleared by the city. In Oak Park, Mich., Julie Bass, a mother of six, faced up to 93 days in jail for refusing to take out the raised beds in front of her home and plant what the city deemed "suitable" ground cover.

These and other cases have drawn national attention, as well as outrage from gardeners, some of whom have begun referring to the isolated skirmishes as a broader "war on gardens." Roger Doiron, the founder and director of Kitchen Gardeners International, a group promoting food gardens, has marshaled support for Bass and others.

"If you define a war as a struggle between opposing forces, this does fit the bill," he said.

While Arlington does not regulate home gardens, "good gardens make good neighbors" (with a nod to Robert Frost).

*New Orleans Times-Picayune 12-21-12*

# PUTTING THE “GARDEN” BACK IN GARDEN

## APARTMENTS AND OTHER MULTIFAMILY HOUSING

- USA Today reported recently (12.19.12), “Aiming to lure eco-minded consumers, more residential developers are offering vegetable gardens as an amenity. These gardens are sprouting in new and older complexes, both luxury and affordable.”
- Obvious benefits:
  - Enhances on-site food production, food security and convenience with less cost
  - Provides a common bond and sense of community for residents
  - Attracts empty-nesters who miss tilling their own soil
  - Pays environmental dividends
- Here in Arlington: Non-profit BRAVO (Buyers and Renters Arlington Voice) is working with AHC, APAH and other multifamily owners and developers.

Witness: Whitefield Commons, River House, Virginia Gardens and Colonial Village.

- What more can be done?





## WHAT'S ALL THE BUZZ ABOUT, HONEY?

- No current regulation of household beekeeping in Arlington
- Little buzz for any regulation



# OTHER FOWL CREATURES OR ANIMALS GOT YOUR GOAT?

- Some support for pygmy goats, which are small and more akin to pets than farm animals
- For full size goats, are milk, cheese and environmentally friendly lawn-mowing worth the predictable downsides?
- Little apparent popular groundswell for livestock, fish farms or other edible household creatures





# HENS FOR EVERY HOME? OR BACKYARDS, NOT BARNYARDS?



- Very emotional issue stirring strong feelings on both sides, with few being truly ambivalent

A. "I cannot conceive a better method of trashing a neighborhood's home values than allowing people to raise chickens in their yards. The stench of fowl feces provides adequate basis for quashing this ridiculous idea, but the potential for neighborhood strife is the biggest risk of this dumb and harmful notion."

-Mark X.



B. “Permitting property owners to raise small numbers of hens (not roosters) in one’s yard can impact the environment in a positive way. Chickens eat bugs and insects, as well as kitchen scraps which might otherwise go into the trash. They provide fertilizer which is far preferable to the chemicals widely used by many gardeners. They provide an inexpensive and valuable source of protein to families, something which is very important at a time of high food costs for financially-strapped families . . .”

-Diana W.

- Is there room for compromise? Possible regulatory benchmarks include:

A. Hen registration fee

- One time only?
- Annual renewal?
- Means tested sliding scale?



B. mandatory plan filing showing coop specs and placement?

C. inspection of yard and coop prior to occupancy?

- D. pre-approval by all adjacent property owners or those within x feet of henkeeper?
- E. set maximum of hens but no roosters (though allow for conjugal visits)?
- F. specify required distance from any property line?
- G. educational material on best practices:  
mandatory online course? Testing?
- H. pilot program in SF neighborhoods, certain apartment projects and/ or community gardens?
- I. provision for older or unproductive hens?

- Will these protocols, if properly enforced, eliminate or at least substantially mitigate concerns related to health, disease, rodents, predators, noise, odors, and aesthetic considerations?
- What is the monitoring and enforcement scheme?
- How much will it cost?
- Is it worth it?
- Your Task Force took eggstra care to ensure that all issues were carefully examined before any chickens come home to roost!



# THEN WHAT?

- On June 11, 2013, we presented a nearly 100 page report to the Arlington County Board in a two-hour Work Session attended by all five County Board Members.
- The Board “accepted” the report and now County Manager, Barbara Donnellan and staff are studying our recommendations and will present their recommendations to the County Board shortly, at which time the Board may choose to host a Work Session to refine an action plan with further input from the public.



# RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES

- A. **Ensure institutional and regulatory support for urban agriculture through local government tools.**
1. To continue to implement the UATF mission going forward, the County Board should establish and appoint a **standing Commission on Urban Agriculture**, with staff liaison and similar structure to other County advisory commissions.
  2. The County should perform a **comprehensive review of all County planning documents** to ensure that urban agriculture and sustainable food planning are integrated in operative documents as they are modified, renewed or produced, ranging from the County's Comprehensive Plan to General Land Use Plan, Sector Plans, Revitalization Plans, Neighborhood Conservation Plans and the Zoning Ordinance.

# RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES

## (CONTINUED)

### **B. Increase fresh local food production and expand distribution to enhance healthy eating and food security.**

3. Expand the availability of **community gardens, urban farms, and other urban agriculture initiatives** by identifying additional sites across the County.
4. Strengthen the already-robust **Arlington's Farmers' Markets network** by (a) facilitating use of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits at all market locations and (b) supporting the creation of a permanent covered year-round Farmers' Market.
5. Encourage the establishment of a **local food hub** including an online option to match food producers, distributors and consumers.
6. Replicate the Crystal City BID (Business Improvement District) model for **community-supported agriculture (CSA)**/farm-to-consumer agriculture.

# RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES

(CONTINUED)

**C. Prioritize education and learning of best practices in urban agriculture topics to promote access to safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate and sustainably grown food.**

7. Leverage the expertise and talent of our libraries, public and private primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, and adult education to bring **healthy eating and urban agriculture education** to Arlington residents of every age and residential context.
8. Ensure that urban agriculture education focusing on Arlington school children is given top priority in any adaptive reuse or repurposing of the **Reeves historic farmhouse**.

# RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES

(CONTINUED)

**D. Implement an environmentally sound and effective food waste and recycling system while increasing healthy soils.**

9. Initiate a **municipal composting system** to ensure an effective and ecologically appropriate disposal, reuse, and recycling system for food scraps, yard waste and other organic materials.

# WHAT ABOUT HENS?

Variable	Consensus Report	Minority Report #1	Minority Report #2*
<i>Roosters?</i>	No	No	NA
<i># of hens?</i>	4 maximum	5 maximum ( $\leq \frac{1}{2}$ acre lot) ? Maximum ( $> \frac{1}{2}$ acre lot)	NA
<i>Adjacent neighbor(s)' consent?</i>	majority approval	No neighbor consent required	NA
<i>Lot line setback?</i>	minimum 20ft.	minimum 7ft.	
<i>Habitable dwelling setback?</i>	None specified	35 ft. from adjacent property habitable structures **	
<i>Permitting fee?</i>	Yes; no \$ specified	\$30/year	NA
<i>Coop plans &amp; specs?</i>	Yes; pre-use specs & placement filing; pre-use coop & yard inspection	Yes; no-pre-use filing or inspection but coop height & sq. ft. specs.	NA
<i>Inspection &amp; Enforcement process?</i>	Yes	Yes	NA

\* MR #2 recommends a comprehensive study to examine perceived advantages, disadvantages, demand and impact on food security challenges with backyard hens.

\*\* absent neighbor(s) waiver



Green Acres is the place for me.  
Farm livin' is the life for me.  
Land spreadin' out so far and wide  
Keep Manhattan, just give me that countryside.

New York is where I'd rather stay.  
I get allergic smelling hay.  
I just adore a penthouse view.  
Dah-ling I love you but give me Park Avenue.

...The chores  
...The stores  
...Fresh air  
...Times Square

You are my wife.  
Good bye, city life.  
Green Acres we are there.

